

When Soft Voices Fail

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Summary: Barnabas kidnapped Maggie and attempted to turn her into Josette. This is the story of what happens when he succeeds. Not a "happily-ever-after" fic.

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****When Soft Voices Fail****

She sits, brushing her hair. The mirror before her reflects the room -- all ornate antiques and smothering draperies, dusty with age and neglect -- and a sweetly vacant face. On the dressing table, a delicate music box spins a haunting melody.

Her name, though she has forgotten it, is Maggie.

Slowly, slowly, the silver brush strokes her hair, glowing auburn in the candlelight. Her eyes never stray from the mirror, though it is not vanity which motivates her, but rather a vague fascination, as if she stares into a stranger's face.

"Josette," she whispers, tasting the name, testing it for fit. Somehow, she knows it is not right. Not hers. "Josette... My name?"

When her captor enters the room, she does not react. The brush continues its even stroking, the music twines about her thoughts... and her lips shape the alien name, softly...softly.

He stands behind her, ever watchful. There is no reflection to betray his presence to the girl; until he takes her hand and draws her from her chair, she does not seem to know he is there. Her world has spiraled in upon her -- and she is lost. Who will guard her steps?

As if he can read her tangled thoughts, he guides her to the bed.

An automaton, her eyes shadowed, she lies docile as he covers her with the musty quilt. It smells of Time and decay, but her lips form no protests. Instead, they shape the word, the name, the lifeline.

Josette.

At his murmured command, she slips obediently into dreams. And, in her dreams, a lost child screams.

A captive of the music box's spell, she sits as before; her thoughts dance like butterflies in a haunted garden. Beside her, a shadow flickers. Her hand, holding the brush, hesitates.

"I...am Josette," she says. The music spins in her mind, silken threads to ensnare her fluttering thoughts. "Josette..."

_No! _

The shadow drifts closer. She knows she should be afraid, but somehow, she is not. The shadow is a part of the music, a part of her -- but separate. In her mind, the silken threads begin to fray.

"My name is...Josette?" The words lack conviction, and she trembles. For if she is not Josette, who is she? Better to be someone, even a stranger, than no one at all. A shadow...

The shadow's voice is soft, a part of the music in her torn mind. It weaves the threads into a new pattern. New...but strangely familiar.

Maggie, it whispers._ You are Maggie!_

Tears cloud her eyes. She shakes her head, trembling. "Who am I?"

_You are Maggie. _A soothing zephyr, the voice quiets her terror, gathering her memories like scattered leaves. _Remember. You are Maggie Evans!_

Then it is gone, shadow and voice fading like the last vestiges of the daylight outside her window. There is a faint breath of jasmine in the air.

She stares into the familiar/strange face in the mirror, and whispers her own name, like a talisman to hold back the darkness. "I am Maggie Evans."

The door is solid, barred. She presses her hands, cold with the sweat of fear, hard against the unyielding iron. She imagines some of its solidity -- its reality -- seeping into her, penetrating her bones, hardening the marrow. It steadies her, this strange image of herself petrified, made over in another's image. But not his. Never his!

She clings to the thought, anchoring herself. So often now, she wanders within the confines of her mind. She has begun to fear that she will one day forget her way back. So she clings to the bars as

she clings to her tattered sanity. Fantasy becomes reality in the dark confines of her prison.

And reality? Reality is nightmare.

Her only companion in the darkness, the music box plays. Music for the dance of madness swirling, Dervish-like, behind her frightened eyes. Silver music, bright and brittle like the fear shining in her mind, a silver web with a ruby spider lurking at its core -- waiting to entangle her in its silk and drink her dry.

Tonight, he will come again.

Tonight, she will die.

She closes her eyes and draws into herself, deep into the shadowed recesses where the spider cannot go. Deeper, deeper... Until there is no thought, no plan, no escape. No hope...

No Maggie.

Gently, she closes the lid of the music box, stilling the melody. Behind her, heavy footsteps echo hollowly from the brick and stone. The iron door shrieks as it is opened, admitting darkness. He is here.

Her breath catches in her throat. She turns.

"...Barnabas."

Shocked, he recoils from her, unable to believe -- even though this has been his goal, these long weeks since he first imprisoned Maggie. But this is not Maggie, not anymore. It is too much; madness lurks in his dark eyes, and a wildness, longing to be tamed. She sees it all with gentle eyes.

Her hand brushes his pale cheek, grave-cold flesh that has not seen the sun in almost two hundred years. Jasmine fills the air between them as she takes him into her arms.

She gazes into the mirror, into wide brown eyes -- windows of the soul. Somewhere behind them, a frightened girl huddles in the safety of the shadows, a ghost haunting the corridors of her own mind. One day, she may find the courage to emerge. But for now...

The Other will guard her, protect the child-spirit within. The Other is older, and with age has come bitter-won strength. She will keep Maggie safe. Alive.

Josette brushes her long auburn hair, a sad smile touching her lips. One is lost, but one has come home.

And, on the table beside her, the music box plays.

The End?

End
file.